Evaluation of Sources
Evaluating Print and Electronic Sources

Tara Guthrie, 2009
Why do I need to evaluate my sources?

- I want to be sure that the information I find is correct and useful for my needs.

Tara Guthrie, 2009
Why would information not be correct or useful to me?

- The information could be out of date for your topic. (i.e. 10 year-old info on computers.)
- The person who wrote it may not have enough knowledge or expertise in the subject.
- The information could be biased or someone’s opinion instead of being fact.
- The information may not be suitable for your research needs. (i.e. too technical, or maybe not enough details.)

Tara Guthrie, 2009
How can I tell if information is correct or useful?

- There are five criteria to look for in a source:
  - Accuracy
  - Authority
  - Objectivity
  - Currency
  - Coverage

Tara Guthrie, 2009
ACCURACY

- Who is the author?
- Are they affiliated with an educational institution?
- Is the book, article, web site, etc. written in their area of expertise?
- What is the purpose of the document? Why was it produced? (Look in the introduction or foreword of a book, article or website to find this.)

Tara Guthrie, 2009
AUTHORITY

• What are the author’s credentials?
• Are any credentials even given?
• Is this person qualified to write this document?
• Is it published by a university press? (If so, it is probably scholarly.)
• Check the domain of a web site.
• Know the difference between an author and a webmaster.

Tara Guthrie, 2009
Web Site Domains

• Reliable web site domains include:
  - .edu (educational site)
  - .gov (government site)
  - .org (non-profit organization site)
  - .net (network site)

• Unreliable web site domains include:
  - .com (commercial site - may contain biased or non-authoritative information)
OBJECTIVITY

• What goals/objectives does the document meet?
• How detailed is the information? Is it too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?
• Who is the author writing for? A specialized or a general audience?
OBJECTIVITY

• Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
• Is the information well-researched? Is there a bibliography at the end?
• Is the author objective and un-biased?
• Is the web site free of advertising?
• Is there a published review of the book? Is it positive or negative?
CURRENCY

• When was it published or produced?
• Is it a first edition? (Many editions of a book indicate it has become standard and is reliable.)
• When was the web site last updated?
• How many dead links are on the web page?
• Is the information out-dated? (It may have been current at one time, but is it now?)

Tara Guthrie, 2009
COVERAGE

• Does the source update other sources or add new information? Or is the same information commonly found elsewhere?

• Does it extensively or minimally cover the topic?

• Is the information well-organized? Are the main points clearly presented? Is the author repetitive?
COVERAGE

- Is it a primary or a secondary source?
- Are the links on a web site evaluated?
- Is the information presented cited correctly? Is it cited at all?
- Is it free, or is there a fee to access the information?
- Do you need special software to view the information?

Tara Guthrie, 2009
Review of the 5 Criteria for Evaluating Sources

- Accuracy
- Authority
- Objectivity
- Currency
- Coverage

Tara Guthrie, 2009
You're on your way!

• Once you learn to use these five criteria to evaluate the sources you find and ask yourself these questions, you are on your way to using the most correct, useful, and best resources for your research.